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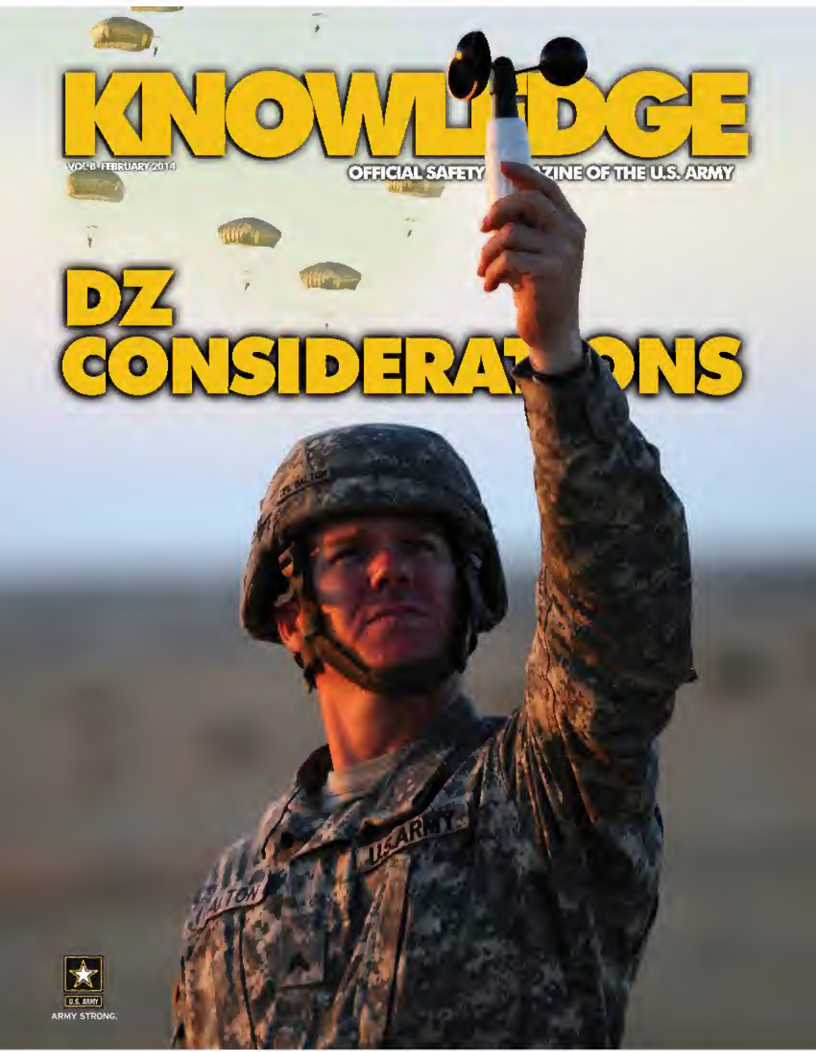
DZ CONSIDERATIONS



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FROM THE DASAF
GO FOR THE GREEN

For many years, the green-amber-red model has been a staple of military planning. It's the way we express readiness – both visually and verbally – for everything from budgets to training to real-time operations. And, in describing our status on risk management and safety, it's also very useful.

As of late January, the Army was green regarding overall fatalities. Accidental deaths were 10 percent below last year's figures, setting the stage for a hopeful second quarter. Ironically, our "greenest" area currently is private motor vehicle losses: Sedan and motorcycle deaths are down nearly 50 percent and 13 percent, respectively, and PMV-other fatalities, which were on the rise last year, have fallen nearly 70 percent thus far in fiscal 2014. That doesn't mean the fight is over, but it does indicate we're making progress in off-duty safety. Leaders and Soldiers at all levels are doing a tremendous job and deserve credit for these successes.

The picture is different on duty, where we're red in most categories. We've seen notable upticks in Army motor vehicle and personnel injury-other fatalities since October. While it's too early to call anything a trend, these two areas warrant increased attention immediately. Every Soldier who's died in an on-duty accident so far this fiscal year was at home station. Is our training up to snuff? Have we assumed away risk/hazards based on our combat experience? We need to ensure our Soldiers aren't letting down their guard simply because they're no longer engaged in combat. The "I'm finally home, so I don't need to be as cautious" mentality is a deadly fallacy, and we must emphasize that in all we do. Whether Soldiers are outside the wire, in garrison or out on the town, you never leave a fallen comrade — the principle isn't exclusive to war.

Applying this model across your formations, some Soldiers will be green, some amber and some red. Some are obviously at risk, while others play by the rules on duty and lead a completely different life off post. Whatever the case, you and your first-line leaders must assess every Soldier's status. This applies to leaders as well; with five of our seven motorcycle losses this year being NCOs, we must be actively involved in their development, emphasizing safety and mentoring programs.

I plan to talk in my next column about messaging. What we say and how it resonates with Soldiers is critical in reaching them about personal risk, and I welcome your feedback for ways the USACR/Safety Center can better communicate the "safety is a readiness imperative" message. We don't have a monopoly on ideas, and outside perspective is always a good thing. Please let me know how we're doing and what we can do better.

Finally, although we're still deep in winter, remember that spring is just around the corner. After months of abysmally low temperatures and record snowfalls, Soldiers will be anxious for some sun and fun. We'll kick off the Army Safe Spring Campaign March 1, so use those tools to augment your existing programs.

Green, amber or red, we're all in the fight together. Make honest assessments, set green as the goal, and don't stop even after we're there. Thank you for working toward it every day.

Army Safe is Army Strong!

TIMOTHY J. EDENS
Brigadier General, USA
Director of Army Safety

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DZ CONSIDERATIONS

GROUND SAFETY OFFICER COURSE STUDENT SUBMISSION
WITH INPUT FROM
MASTER SGT. MICHAEL SMITH AND LT. COL. JAMES SMITH
U.S. Army Combat Readiness/Safety Center
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(Editor's note: This article is an individual's experience as a drop zone safety officer. While the information contained in this article is correct, it's not a complete compilation of duties and requirements as prescribed in Field Manual 3-21.220, Static Line Parachuting Techniques and Training. Before participating in an airborne mission, refer to FM 3-21.220 for all of the requirements.)

During my 20 years as a jumpmaster, the situation often arose where a drop zone safety officer assignment was made at the last minute. In a reserve component unit, there were many reasons last-minute assignments were made, such as someone was attending an Army school instead of drill, there were other priorities and the list goes on. Regardless, airborne operations still needed to happen. While all jumpmasters strive to maintain currency, some are more proficient at DZ operations. I hope to provide some of my observations and concerns. The following narrative assumes an airborne mission occurs in an Army-run DZ.

Planning and Deploying

A DZ survey, AF IMT 3823, is required for airborne operations. Once you're tapped to be the DZSO, get a copy of the airborne operation order and DZ survey as soon as possible. Be sure to attend the airborne mission brief. When you know the plan, gather the support personnel and equipment outlined in Field Manual 3-21.220, Static Line Parachuting Techniques and Training. It's important to get a sufficient number of support personnel assigned to the DZ party. Ensure all personnel know the timeline for operations. Make sure you read and understand the DZSO duties and responsibilities. Take copies of FM 3-21.220, unit standard operating procedures, after-action review forms and any other reference materials with you on the day of the mission. Be sure to conduct a risk assessment and ensure coordination with the airborne commander is completed.

The medic and medevac vehicle driver need to take care of the medical equipment and vehicle. They should also have a map of the route from the DZ to the nearest treatment facility, and it's imperative they have a solid medevac plan. If time is available before the jump, the ground medevac plan should be rehearsed and timed. The rehearsal should occur during the same time window of the jump to gauge traffic density and other conditions.

The radio-telephone operator needs to gather the radios and spare batteries. The radio requirements will be Mission, Enemy, Terrain and Weather, Troops and Support Available, Time Available Civil Consideration, or METT-TC, dependant, but I recommend at least three radios. The RTO should test the radios, using all the frequencies assigned to the airborne mission. There needs to be a primary and alternate means of communication — internal and external — facilitating communication between the DZSO, the malfunction control officer, range operations, medics, departing airfield control officer, emergency services, life flight, the local power company (if power lines are present) and other local agencies as needed.

I suggest having at least two additional personnel for DZ support. These personnel can help you inventory and inspect the DZ kit. The kit should have an inventory list. If it doesn't, refer to FM 3-21.220 for the required items. Perform preventive maintenance checks and services on all equipment. Inspect the helium gas bottle using the gas valve with pressure meter. The gas bottle needs to be at least half full. You need enough gas to release at least two balloons from the DZ. In FM 3-21.220, there's a list of approved anemometers to be used for measuring winds. Leave home station so you arrive at the DZ four hours prior to time on target of the first pass.

Activities on the DZ

Upon arrival at the DZ, walk or drive around to inspect the terrain surface, checking for hazards on and near the DZ as prescribed in FM 3-21.220. Compare what you observe during your inspection with the information listed in block 11 of the DZ diagram on the DZ survey. You need to verify the information and contact the DACO to report any information not listed on the survey. Place a radio with the medics in the medevac vehicle location. Place another radio at the center of the DZ. During your DZ walk around, you can conduct radio checks.

The next step is to release a pilot balloon, or PI BAL, to determine the mean effective winds. Take the time to train inexperienced support personnel; teach them how to inflate the balloon, run the stopwatch, take the balloon direction, measure the balloon elevation angle and observe the balloon. Release the PI BAL and determine the MEW. Use this information to calculate the wind drift using the D = KAV formula. [D = distance in meters. K = constant (drift in meters per 1,000-foot loss of altitude in a 1-knot wind). A = altitude in thousands of feet. V = average wind speed (velocity)]. Normally, it's best to use the PI listed on the DZ survey. However, you need to check FM 3-21.220 for specific PI location for the type of aircraft flying and the DZ.

Train one of the support personnel to take surface wind readings and wind direction, and then transcribe the readings into a logbook. This Soldier can act as a recorder of information during the drop. Walk off the wind drift distance and the forward throw distance to determine the release point. This will be a temporary RP location. Also train the support personnel how to lay out the code letter using the VS-17 signal panel.

Ninety minutes prior to the first drop TOT, release a second PI BAL and determine the MEW. Recalculate wind drift for the RP location and move to the new RP location. Lay out the code letter using the signal panels. The DZ must be established no later than one hour prior to TOT. The RTO needs to begin constant monitoring of the aircraft primary and secondary frequencies. Once communication is established with the aircraft, the drop can begin. Contact the pilot to state drop altitude, drop speed, number jumpers on board and the drop heading. Advise the pilot of the DZ wind speed and direction. After each pass, let the pilot know how many parachutists exited the aircraft.

Post Activities

Give the aircraft crew a strike report in accordance with FM 3-21.220 for each pass. Once the drop is complete, contact the aircraft via radio and thank the aircrew. This simple act will build a good relationship for later airborne missions. Don't begin to tear down until all personnel and equipment are accounted for. Ensure the RTO collects the radios and tears them down. The medics need to pack up any medical equipment and prepare for follow-on tasks. The support personnel can tear down and pack up the signal panels. You will need this information for the airborne AAR you'll send to higher headquarters. Complete the AAR form using the notes taken during the mission. The final task of the mission will be to send the AAR to higher headquarters.

It's important to take your job seriously when performing the duties of a DZSO. Don't take the responsibility lightly. Lives depend upon you doing your job thoroughly, by the books and attentively.

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THE LAST TIME I DIDN'T WEAR A SEAT BELT

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I grew up during a time when most states didn't have laws requiring vehicle occupants to wear a seat belt. As a teenager, I wore a seat belt when I was riding in the car with my parents. Riding with my friends, however, was a different story. For some strange reason, it was uncool to wear a seat belt, especially when riding in a cool car. We knew it was wrong, but what teenager wants to look uncool?

One friend had an early 80s Mercury Lynx with automatic shoulder belts. As soon as you closed the car door, the shoulder belt would ride up a track that ran above the window. The lap belt, however, had to be fastened manually. Being young and naïve, we figured the shoulder belt would be good enough. Little did we know that we'd soon get to test the importance of those shoulder belts.

One evening, as we returned from visiting our girlfriends who lived in a neighboring town, my friend decided to pass a tractor-trailer that was going too slow for us. The highway we were traveling on was flat and we were out in the middle of nowhere, so my friend started to make his move. As the front bumper of our vehicle reached the rear bumper of the semi, my friend saw a car up ahead coming around a slight bend in the road. He hit the brakes and quickly moved back to the right. In his haste to avoid the oncoming vehicle, he overshot the road and our right tires rode over the gravel shoulder. He then hit the brakes again as he tried to move the tires back onto the road. This time, though, the brakes locked up and we went into a skid.

As we slid toward a ditch, the right-rear tire blew out and the rim dug into the soft dirt beyond the gravel, causing us to overturn two and half times. We ended up straddling the ditch upside down, the roof of the car saved from being smashed by resting in the void. As we hung there, I remember thinking just how lucky we were to have had those automatic shoulder belts. Because the passenger door window did not break, I was unable to get out on that side. After we took off our shoulder belts, we were both able to crawl out the back door windows. Of course, nobody stopped to help.

As we inspected the damage to the vehicle and the path we'd taken to end up inverted in a ditch, I realized how easily things could have turned out differently. Fortunately, somebody did call an ambulance for us (this was before widespread cellphone use), and we were taken to the hospital. In the end, I walked away with a couple of bruises. My buddy just needed a few stitches from where he grabbed the windshield as it came in on him. I decided that night I would never ride in a car again without my seat belt, and I wouldn't let anyone else go without one either.

Today, we almost have universal seat belt laws in the United States, and I have a hard time understanding why so many people still refuse to wear them. According to the Department of Transportation in my home state of Wisconsin, of the occupants in passenger cars involved in accidents in 2011, the fatality rate when seat belts were used was .08 percent (137 out of 159,604). Conversely, in accidents where seat belts were not used, the fatality rate was 3.04 percent (138 out of 4,535). That means vehicle occupants were 38 times more likely to die in an accident if they were not wearing seat belts. The numbers also showed that there is a 97.2 percent seat belt compliance rate among those accidents used in the report. That means that 2.8 percent of the drivers and passengers in the state account for half of the fatalities.

We need to watch out for those Soldiers in our formations who choose to not wear their seat belts. I would guess that probably isn't the only risky behavior in which they are partaking. Be actively engaged with your Soldiers and watch their safety attitudes in all their activities. Pay attention when they enter or leave the area to see if they are doing what is right. They all know what right looks like, but if they notice you watching, they'll realize that you care about their well being. Accidents may still happen, but it is senseless to lose people simply because they didn't wear a seat belt.

Did You Know?
New Hampshire is the only state that doesn't require drivers to wear seat belts when operating a motor vehicle.

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BEWARE OF SUCKER HOLES

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For those not familiar with the term, a sucker hole refers to an opening in a cloud layer through which an aviator may descend below the layer. I've heard of sucker holes throughout my relatively short time in Army aviation and always wondered why someone would fall for it. But on one flight, I nearly ended up falling for one myself.

My unit was departing Fort Polk, La., after a month-long Joint Readiness Training Center rotation. I was co-pilot of the lead aircraft in a four-ship formation of UH-60Ms. I had 1,100 hours flight time, and the pilot in command had 800 hours. Our first leg would take the flight from Self Army Airfield to Texarkana Regional Airport in Arkansas. Takeoff was delayed for nearly an hour and a half as we waited for a low cloud layer to burn off at Fort Polk. The weather briefing that morning forecasted a broken layer about 7,000 feet above ground level and a bottom layer at 1,000 feet at points en route to our location. The flight was scheduled to take one hour and 40 minutes.

After departing about 10 a.m., the flight leveled off at 1,000 feet AGL. Everything was going well, and we were on our way home. I was on the controls for the entire first leg. About 30 miles north of Fort Polk, we began to encounter a very sparse, low-level cloud layer at about 700-800 feet, so we climbed to maintain clearance. As the flight continued north, the cloud layer below us slowly increased from few to scattered and finally to broken. We were talking about the increase in clouds throughout the flight, and no sooner than I realized we should start to make a decision about what action to take, the radio came to life.

The company standardization pilot was in Chalk 2, and the company commander, who was also the air mission commander for the flight, was in Chalk 3. When we were about 20 miles southeast of Barksdale Air Force Base, the decision was made to contact approach and proceed to the base. The radios in my aircraft were sketchy at best. We had trouble contacting approach control despite attempts on both the VHF and UHF radios. After several minutes of no contact, Chalk 2 was able to reach air traffic control. At this point, we heard half the radio transmissions (Chalk 2), which only added confusion in the cockpit.

As we a turned west toward Barksdale, my PC established communication with approach, but I had pulled up my pin switch on COM 2 to try to better hear Chalk 2 talking to approach. My PC was unaware of this, and I should have announced the fact to the crew that I had pulled up the pin switch. The flight was closing in on BAFB airspace, and with the confusion due to the lack of communication, I considered descending through a sizable break in the cloud layer that I spotted in front of the flight.

I started to slow and lower the collective. At the same time, I announced this to my PC. No sooner had I started when my PC basically said, "Don't descend." I realized it was a terrible move and quickly readjusted the flight controls to maintain the previous parameters. I noted I had slowed nearly 20 knots indicated air speed during the deceleration, which is a serious hazard to all aircraft in the flight.

The flight continued and every aircraft safely completed an instrument landing into BAFB. I realize that if we had actually been in the clouds instead of between the cloud layers, I would have handled everything per the standards. We always practice inadvertent instrument meteorological conditions procedures, but I had never actually flown in between layers.

The factors that led me to attempt to descend below the layer are no excuse for actually trying it. I was trusted with the duties of flight lead and nearly let my commander and unit down in those duties. When confronted with IIMC, the key is to commit and stay committed, regardless if you are "in the clouds" or "over the top." And beware of sucker holes.

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A SLIP AWAY

CHIEF WARRANT OFFICER 3 JOSEPH S. VALLEROY
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When the commander needs an aircraft, you can bet a Soldier from the maintenance shop will be eagerly standing by to ensure he or she gets it. Unfortunately, sometimes this on-demand convenience leads to Soldiers moving around aircraft quicker than they usually would.

A piece of ground support equipment that crew chiefs frequently rely on is the low-level maintenance platform. Measuring just one-sixteenth of an inch over four feet, this piece of equipment is ideal for working on aircraft. Employing it eliminates the need for the cumbersome B1 maintenance stand. So if maintenance is easier, it's always safer too, right? Not necessarily.

There isn't a general maintenance manual for the low-level maintenance platform, and this has created a problem with the serviceability of the equipment. The only reference material for the stand is located on the Aviation Ground Support Equipment website. Without guidance and enforcement, the platforms sometimes go without preventive maintenance checks and services and end up a safety hazard.

As the production control officer in charge, I've seen some stands with excessively corroded wheel assemblies, rendering the universal brake mechanisms unserviceable. In this condition, it's difficult to secure and position a stand in the work area safely. When a maintenance platform is used in a double-stacked position (which is common practice), it is unstable and an accident waiting to happen. I've seen a Soldier fall from a maintenance platform and end up with stitches.

The low-level maintenance platform meets the requirements of the Occupational Safety and Health Administration as a mobile work platform (OSHA 29 CFR 1910.29 (e) and (f)). It is crucial, however, that supervisors ensure their Soldiers are trained on the use, care and maintenance of this equipment. When the platform is in the open position, there needs to be eight stable feet on the floor, which will keep the stand from rolling when weight is applied.

An alternate to a low-level maintenance platform is a mobile ladder stand that Soldiers who need the height to work around engine cowlings can easily put in place and use safely. Using a mobile ladder stand that complies with the 29 CFR 1910 is a safer and less expensive alternative to the low-level maintenance platform. These ladders have caster wheels and footpads that lock into place when weight is applied for use in the hangars.

It is important that aviation maintenance technicians stay engaged in hangar and shop operations. Tools that our Soldiers use may be unsafe and unserviceable; we'll never know until we check or if there's a mishap. Our commanders are relying on us to be the eyes and ears of safety for our organizations. Engaged leadership leads to productive maintenance units, thus preventing unnecessary injuries that reduce morale, quality and combat effectiveness.

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VEHICLE MAINTENANCE

CHIEF WARRANT OFFICER 3 ROBERT MORRIS

As the company safety officer for my unit, I was sometimes asked if vehicle inspections were completed. Usually, my response was, "Yes and no." On paper, you could clearly see the inspections were done; however, I knew in the back of my mind that many had been pencil whipped by a buddy.

At the time, I was fortunate to have been in a unit where we'd gone three years without a private motor vehicle fatality. Because of that, though, I believed many in the unit had a false sense of security. So, as the safety officer, I did my best to provide reason and applicability as to why we were required to do the things we did.

The first step in proper vehicle maintenance is to have it serviced according to the schedule in your owner's manual. At different mileage intervals, certain maintenance actions should be performed on your car by trained technicians. In addition, should you be stationed in a foreign country like my unit was, there may be other inspections your vehicle must pass before it can be registered or driven.

Beyond these things, however, there are simple checks you can do to help keep your vehicle safe on the road. By simply using your senses, you can often detect common vehicle problems. For example, look at the area beneath your vehicle. Small stains or an occasional drop of fluid under your car may not mean much, but wet spots or puddles deserve attention. You may be losing coolant, engine oil or transmission or brake fluid.

Some problems just smell like trouble, so it's also a good idea to keep your nose in tune with your vehicle. Here are some odors that sometimes accompany an issue with the vehicle:

- A burnt toast smell — a light, sharp odor — often signals an electrical short and burning insulation. To be safe, do not drive the vehicle until the problem is diagnosed.

- A rotten egg odor — a continuous, burning-sulfur smell — usually indicates a problem in the catalytic converter or other emission-control device. Do not delay diagnosis or repair if you suspect such a problem.

- The smell of gasoline vapors after a failed start could mean you have flooded the engine. If the odor persists, chances are there is a leak in the fuel system, a potentially dangerous problem that requires immediate attention.

- A sweet, steamy smell indicates a coolant leak. If the odor is accompanied by a hot metallic scent and steam is coming from under the hood, your engine has overheated. Pull over immediately; continued driving could cause severe engine damage.

Your vehicle can also "sound" like trouble. Here are some common noises and what they could mean:

- Squeals — shrill, sharp noises usually related to engine speed — can indicate loose or worn power steering, fan or air conditioning belts.

- Screeches — high-pitched, piercing metallic sounds that usually occur while the vehicle is in motion — are often caused by brake wear indicators letting you know it's time to have your brakes serviced. Some brake systems are designed to make a clicking or chirping sound as the brakes get to the point of needing maintenance.

- Rumbles — low-pitched, rhythmic sounds — could point to a defective exhaust pipe, catalytic converter or muffler, or could indicate a worn universal joint or other driveline component.

- Heavy knocks — rhythmic, pounding sounds — can indicate a worn crankshaft, connecting rod bearing(s) or a loose transmission torque converter.

- Clunks — random thumping sounds — could indicate a loose shock absorber or other suspension component. Clunks may also indicate a loose exhaust pipe or muffler.

Not all of us are mechanically inclined, but there are some things anyone can do to ensure their vehicle remains in good operating order. Some of the most important things to monitor and check regularly include:

- Engine oil level and cleanliness under the hood

- Antifreeze/ coolant level

- Brake and power steering fluid levels

- Transmission fluid

- Belts

When checking fluid levels, the engine usually has containers and canisters with fill level lines marked on them. Ensure the fluid levels are not below the minimum line or above the maximum line. You should always keep an eye out for any leaks or worn tubes and hoses. Before servicing any of the above items, however, first consult your vehicle owner's manual for guidance.

Other things to be watchful for in and around the engine include loose electrical connections, worn or exposed wires, warped belts and clamps for hoses that may be damaged or loose. You should also keep an eye on your vehicle battery from time to time. Check for corrosion, as well as the age of the battery. Batteries should be replaced every five years or so. Most batteries also come with comprehensive warranties.

As you can see, you don't have to be a mechanic to ensure your vehicle remains in good condition. A little routine maintenance can go a long way. And if you ever notice a problem, take it to a reputable mechanic to have it checked out. Remember, a healthy car is a safer car on the open road.

IF YOU AREN'T SURE, ASK

CHIEF WARRANT OFFICER 2 FERNAND MUFFOLETTO
10th Combat Aviation Brigade
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Every year, the 10th Mountain Division celebrates its history and heritage with an event called Mountain Fest. The event features organized sports and a division run and culminates with a festival with games, food and a live concert. The military portion of the festival is a salute to the nation, followed by a mock tactical assault. The assault is our way of showing the 10th Mountain's ability at conducting asymmetrical operations and the division's ability to perform ground and air integration to fight our nation's wars.

Before this assault took place, part of the risk mitigation was to conduct several rehearsals. Kiowa Warriors conducted close-combat attack in support of two Chinooks delivering two howitzers to support four Black Hawks as they inserted a platoon of infantry to raid a mock village. My part of this operation was being the pilot in command of the lead Kiowa. We conducted the first of two rehearsals with no issues and departed the objective for refueling. As flight lead, we called tower and requested a right base for Buffalo (which is our hot refuel location). We landed at Hot Pad 1 and conducted our after-landing checks and then hot refuel checks. When the checks were complete, I gave the petroleum supply specialists the go-ahead to start refueling.

As they connected the nozzle to our fuel port, I gave the hand and arm signal that we were taking fuel, and the petroleum supply specialist acknowledged. Shortly after, I looked over my right shoulder and saw fuel spraying from the area where the nozzle would be connected to the fuel port, so I immediately conducted an emergency shutdown. When the emergency procedure was complete, I told the co-pilot I was getting out of the aircraft to see how much fuel sprayed on the aircraft. After assessing the situation, I then asked the petroleum supply specialist to get the spill kit so we could wipe down the aircraft. Knowing that we still had one more rehearsal to complete, I helped the petroleum supply specialist wipe down the aircraft. After the specialist gave me the thumbs up and we couldn't do any more cleanup at the refuel point, I decided to start the aircraft and continue the mission. Following engine start, I called the air mission commander and rejoined them for the second iteration of the rehearsal. It went off with no issues and we landed when the mission was complete.

Back at the hangar, our company maintenance test pilot asked me if I received clearance to take off after the aircraft was splashed with fuel. I said I had not, but I made the call as the PC to finish the mission. We then conducted a hot wash to talk about what we could have done better.

The battalion safety officer told me there was no standard operating procedure explaining follow-up actions for fuel splashes. He said the smart thing to do would have been to contact a safety officer and ask for guidance. As the PC, I should have called and talked to my company safety representative about the who, what, when, where and why of the incident.

Upon being further educated on why we need to get the aircraft back to the hangar immediately after an incident involving spilled fuel, it was brought to my attention that the fuel will corrode the fiberglass and sheet metal of the aircraft, weakening it. The aircraft needs to be washed as soon as possible following the incident. I learned an important lesson that day: If you aren't sure, ask.

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READY, SET — DON'T GO

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A few years ago, I was a young platoon leader deployed to Mosul, Iraq. One afternoon, after completing a round of checkpoint missions, I heard about a track meet that the forward operating base was hosting. As a hard-charging PL, I took my job seriously, but I also believed in personal downtime.

I've always loved competitive running, so I was eager to participate in the meet. However, the meet was that day, and I wasn't in my best shape because of my unit's operating tempo. Nevertheless, I felt I could still compete because I'd been a good runner in high school. I arrived at the venue and signed up for two events: the 100- and 200-meter dashes. I had won first place in both of these events at the Mississippi High School Athletics Association Championship track meet state finals a few years prior (cue Bruce Springsteen's 80s hit "Glory Days").

The temperature that day was well over 120 F. I think the heat must have got to me because I neglected to stretch and go through my normal warm-up ritual before reporting for my first event, the 100-meter dash. As we waited at the starting line, the official gave the commands, "Runners to your mark. Runners set," and then blew the whistle. Just like the old days, I started with a commanding lead and blazed down the track. About the 80-meter mark, however, I felt the most excruciating pain I had ever experienced in my life! I knew I'd tweaked my hamstring, but I was able to compose myself enough to limp across the finish line in third place.

I thought I'd only pulled my hamstring, but was I ever wrong! The medics told me I'd suffered a Grade III pull, which meant I tore one of the three muscles in my hamstring. The pain was agonizing. My leg hurt badly just resting it — and even worse when I moved. Before long, I had difficulty walking without assistance, and there was noticeable swelling and bruising. This was devastating to not only me, but also the rest of my platoon. I was out of the fight with a profile restricting me to minimal duty. Because of my selfish behavior and failure to prepare, I left the men I'd been charged to lead without a platoon leader.

With hindsight being 20/20, there were several things I could've done to prevent my injury. I should've stretched and gone through a proper warm-up ritual. I also should have realized my physical limitations. The bottom line is I shouldn't have competed. By doing so, I didn't place the mission and my men first. As good leaders, that's what we are taught to do.

Now, as a battalion safety officer, I believe I'm in a better position to have a positive influence on athletic events. Implementation of certain control measures can prevent injuries and help avoid mission degradation. Soldiers of all ranks need to understand the risk to mission readiness when participating in sports. Applying the steps of risk management before an event keeps us fit to fight for another day!

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TRUTH AND CONSEQUENCES

CHIEF WARRANT OFFICER 2 CHRISTOPHER K. MEAD
Fairbanks, Alaska

I never gave much thought to off-duty safety. For me, it was just something I always had to hear about before being released for a long weekend. The message was always the same: Have a plan, wear your PPE, take a buddy and on and on and on. Fortunately, I eventually got the message — but it nearly cost me my life.

I'd owned my Polaris Ranger RZR (a side-by-side all-terrain vehicle) for about six months and ridden it almost daily. On this particular day, I told my wife where I was planning on riding and grabbed my helmet and cellphone. As far as I was concerned, I'd just met my off-duty safety requirements. I was having a good time riding by myself when I found a trail that branched off my normal route. I decided it would be fun to see what this new trail had to offer.

Man, that was a great idea, as this trail was so much more fun than my normal route. I was flying, at times reaching about 70 mph. And just when I thought it couldn't get any better, the trail got muddy. I mean, who doesn't like to get a little mud on the tires? Then it happened: I got stuck.

When I say I got stuck, I really mean it. In fact, I was so stuck that I broke my winch cable trying to get out. I then had to tie it off with a synthetic cable, get a snatch block and try again. Once I was finally out, the ATV promptly got stuck again. So I winched. Then I got stuck. And then I winched some more. And then I got stuck yet again. Eventually, I made it past the mud and the trail opened back up. With nothing in my way, I took off … fast. Then I saw a turn.

The ATV rolled, landing on the driver's side. My helmet, which I wasn't wearing, flew past my head and out of the ATV. I decided that this was a sign that it was time to go home. A little while later, I arrived back at the house without any further incidents.

So let's analyze what happened here. First, I had a plan when I left the house, riding a trail I was familiar with. Second, I had my PPE. Third, while I didn't take a buddy with me, I did let someone know what I was going and the trail that I was going to use. I also brought my cellphone in case of an emergency. On top of all this, the Polaris RZR is equipped with a roll cage and seat belts. I was wearing my seat belt (which is the reason I didn't get ejected from the ATV). Based on all that, it sounds like I did a pretty good job ensuring my safety, right?

Let's be honest, though. I did very little right that day. Yes, I had a plan, but it changed when I found that new trail, and nobody knew about it. But, hey, that's OK because if something were to go wrong, at least I had my cellphone. Did I mention that I knew I didn't get a signal on that trail, so the phone was virtually worthless? And what about my helmet? I brought it but never bothered to put it on. What good does PPE do if you don't even wear it? What's more, the helmet almost took me out when I rolled the ATV, just missing my head by inches. How ironic would it have been if the gear that was supposed to protect my noggin would have caused a head injury?

I made a lot of poor decisions that day. I'm lucky those decisions didn't lead to an injury or, even worse, my death. As an Army, I believe we do a good job of being safety conscious at work. However, we must remember to bring those safe practices home. Whether the accident happens at work or in the woods behind your house while riding your ATV, the result is the same — the loss of a Soldier.

UNDER PRESSURE

CHIEF WARRANT OFFICER 2 JASON MAIREL
C Company, 1-52 MEDEVAC
Fort Wainwright, Alaska

Many times in a deployed environment, things that were once high on the priority list are moved toward the bottom. This can be broken down to two simple reasons: time and threat. We hurry due to whatever the circumstances. Whether it is an urgent medevac, a time on target or unexpected passengers arriving early, we, as an aircrew, have all felt the squeeze of time. This brings to mind a couple of personal experiences that could have ended very differently. Both were near misses when considering the potential for catastrophic outcomes. Each demonstrates our clouded judgment and jumbled priorities when feeling pressures that are so common in our field.

As a young crew chief, I found myself based in Camp Udari, Kuwait, serving as VIP support for Third Army. We had a mission requiring three ships to pick up passengers at Arifjan and shuttle them to several different locations throughout Kuwait. Pretty routine stuff, considering we had already supported similar missions for several months. Due to the high profile of this specific mission and the number of passengers we were transporting, we had two crew chiefs per airframe. In Chalk 1, it was me and another crew chief. Our platoon flight instructor and a readiness-level 2 crew chief were in Chalk 2, and two experienced crew chiefs were in Chalk 3.

We landed early in Arifjan for refueling and to hopefully grab some breakfast. Our FI volunteered to stay behind with the aircraft while we all got chow. This gave him time to get some valuable systems training done with the new guy.

As we were on our way back from the chow hall, we saw three Suburbans pulling up to the aircraft. We all started running to the pads, throwing on our vests and blasting through checklists. It was just a matter of a few minutes until we were all lined up and making the call for takeoff. The entire sequence was not unfamiliar, but it was not the way we usually did business. We departed without issue as a flight of three and were operating normally.

After a couple minutes, I announced that I would be coming inside to start a fuel check. I quickly copied my numbers, started my clock and returned outside. About that time, Chalk 2 announced they would be sliding staggered right due to some towers on the left side of the route. As the aircraft came into sight, I announced I had them at about five rotor disks. Then I noticed something was wrong. It appeared as if the aircraft had two wings on top of it, flapping rapidly. Clearly not normal! I realized it was the auxiliary power unit doors. Apparently, when they were going over the systems back at Arifjan, they failed to secure the doors on their way down from on top of the aircraft, most likely a result of passengers arriving early. I announced what I saw and immediately the pilots contacted Chalks 2 and 3 to make a decision as to what would be done to resolve this.

We were just a couple of minutes from the embassy, and being over the city meant we would be hard pressed to find a place to land and shut down three UH-60s. We decided to press on. Upon arrival, the three aircraft quickly shut down, passengers exited and the crew of the damaged aircraft climbed up to assess the situation. The door's latches had punched holes in the No. 1 engine hover infrared suppression system, the beam supporting the center of the compartment had been damaged and two rotor blades were badly gouged. Obviously, the doors themselves were destroyed.

Feeling the pressure of senior officers waiting on you as a young enlisted Soldier is stressful. But considering the stress and fear brought on by that situation, taking the extra 10 seconds to ensure we have done things by the book would have been well worth it. The poor RL-2 crew chief clearly felt terrible about the situation. He learned from this mistake and moved on to become a very solid member of the team.

Another situation I remember happened as we were taxiing out for takeoff in a flight of four. I was sitting in the left seat, facing the runway, and noticed an aircraft about to take off with its driveshaft covers open. I told the pilots and they quickly relayed the information on the advisory frequency. Perhaps this situation was caused by the urgency of their mission or the fact there were several aircraft waiting for them to take off. I am not quite sure, but what I saw next blew my mind. A crewmember exited the aircraft on the number one side and reached over the moving driveshaft to secure the cover. We all gasped when we saw this. Fortunately for him, it ended without incident, but the outcome could have been horrific if his flight uniform or gear had simply brushed against the driveshaft.

People have near misses and sometimes learn from the fear they felt once they realized what it was they were doing. Other times, unfortunately, it just reinforces that kind of behavior. This gives the person a sense of invincibility or superiority in their job.

A certain level of confidence and willingness to take risks is important in our profession. However, there are risks that make sense and risks that are stupid and should not be repeated. We have all taken unnecessary risks. Whether at work or at home, the fact is it happens. The important takeaway from all of this is that we need to be able to recognize these decisions as what they are and correct the behavior before we end up learning the hard way. Or even worse, a young Soldier or one of our children see this behavior and adopts it as their own.

Don't fall into the trap that claims lives of too many Soldiers and family members both on and off duty. Take the time to follow the prescribed methods and procedures. They are most often written in blood and published to keep history from repeating.

RESPECT THE ROAD

CHIEF WARRANT OFFICER 2 KEVIN CEDERQUIST
A Company, 168th Aviation Battalion
Idaho National Guard
Boise, Idaho

They say there are only two kinds of motorcycle riders — those who have crashed and those who are going to crash. While I do not take pride in this fact, I must admit that I am a rider who has crashed … twice.

I don't consider myself to be rash. And in all the years I've ridden motorcycles, I don't think anyone would call me reckless. But, like most people, I do suffer from an occasional lapse in judgment. More on that later.

As I mentioned earlier, I have crashed twice, but I should clarify. The first accident occurred on a street bike when I was 18. I had been riding off-road bikes since I was 10 and was very comfortable in the dirt. The road, however, was a whole new ballgame. I was cautious, but I lacked street experience. The primary contributing factor to the accident was mechanical failure, and due to my discomfort with a heavier motorcycle and higher speeds — not to mention an unforgiving paved surface — I lost control and found myself on my back in the middle of the highway. There wasn't any serious damage to me or the bike, and I was able to limp it home. No harm, no foul, drive on.

Fast forward five years to early spring in the high deserts of the northwest. I'm now 23, married, in the National Guard and attending college. I own a house, two cars and, once again, a street bike. This one is a bit newer and bigger — and a lot faster. It's an air-cooled, high-speed/low-drag, sport-touring, all-around-fun bike with a lot of low-end torque. It's the perfect bike for a responsible guy who doesn't race on the weekends, run away from cops or ride like he's got something to prove. That was me, and life was good.

The craziest thing I had done on that bike was dent the gas tank while pushing it into the garage. I wore all my protective gear every time I rode, including a helmet, riding jacket, riding pants, boots and gloves. It was cumbersome and hot at times, but it felt right (and it won me brownie points with the wife). It also saved my life. Here's how:

My best friend growing up was AJ. We did everything together. In fact, I consider him more like a brother than a friend (except we actually get along). I called his parents Mom and Dad and practically lived at his house when I was a teenager. In early spring of 2007, AJ moved to the same town I lived in and, of course, brought his motorcycle. He never rode motorcycles when were growing up and only had this bike for a couple of months. However, he did have all the proper gear, a level head and a learner's permit. There was a long riding season just around the corner and some sweet "twisties" we would be able to hit up. Our state of mind could probably have been summed up as, "Four wheels move the body, but two wheels move the soul." Neither of us rode reckless or illegally; we just rode to enjoy the ride. Perhaps our folly was we didn't think we were dangerous.

The same day AJ got to town, before he even unpacked his toothbrush, he had his bike off the trailer and I had mine out of the garage. The sun was shining, the snow was gone and the roads were dry. It was a perfect day to kick off the dust and twist the throttle. We were only going to be gone about 15-20 minutes because we needed to unload the trailer. AJ's bike was about 100cc smaller than mine and geared for less low-end torque, but it would get you moving if you wanted it to. It was also a sport-touring-style bike — perfect for a novice rider, yet one that would not leave you disappointed as you gained confidence.

We took off about 9 a.m. Since I knew the area, I was in the lead. I got caught at a stop light about a quarter-mile from the house, but it turned green just as I hit first gear, and AJ shot past me. Here's the lapse in judgment. I rocked the throttle back and popped the clutch like I was being chased by an angry sergeant major. There was no way that smaller bike was going to out-strip me. I'm sure AJ could see me gaining in his mirror and he didn't let up. There was a curve left and then right up ahead, and I was ready for them. AJ, however, didn't know they were there. As he hit the edge of the first corner, there was no hope. The loose gravel and sand on the side of the road from winter sanding was pretty unforgiving, and he went straight into the ditch. Enter folly No. 2: I got tunnel vision. I watched him go off the road in slow motion. I'm not sure if I even started the turn, but I do know I went right off the road after him.

I pitched over the handle bars and did a sort of dive roll, then another, and another and another. Each time I tumbled over, I caught a glimpse of my bike doing summersaults in the air, following me at an uncomfortably close distance. Eventually, I skidded to a stop, made a quick inventory of all my limbs and jumped to my feet to find my partner in crime. He was laying about 50 feet back, his bike in several pathetic pieces, just like mine. I helped him get his helmet off and sat him up. He was white as a ghost and clutching his wrist. "I think I broke my arm," he said kind of distantly. When he let go of his wrist, his arm, from about five inches below his elbow, flopped strait down. Yep, it was nasty.

A minute later, I made the call of shame to my wife. We had crashed not even a mile from my house, so she was there in less than two minutes. When all was said and done, I think that ride turned out to be well over $20,000 per mile.

I haven't given up riding and neither has AJ, but we do it with more respect for the road. We still ride because we enjoy it. We still obey the laws, wear all our gear and we like to glide through curves. I have almost been smashed by inattentive drivers, run over by tailgaters and blown away by strong crosswinds. I'm a safe rider, but I never let my guard down, not even once. I guess that's the price to pay to stay alive and still get out there to enjoy the sport. I gained some priceless insight on the day we crashed. So did AJ … along with two metal plates in his arm.

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SAFETY: A COMBAT MULTIPLIER

JOHN HANSON AND MAJ. THOMAS CAMPBELL
1st Theater Sustainment Command
Afghanistan

In Afghanistan, coalition forces continue to focus on the train, advise and assist mission of their Afghan counterparts. For the 1st Theater Sustainment Command and its subordinate units, the effort continues to be on sustaining U.S. forces to ensure they can perform their mission. As the Afghans continue to take the lead for security in their country, the 1st TSC is conducting the historic retrograde mission to posture U.S. forces for the Resolute Support Mission while bringing needed military capability back to our forces at home to prepare them for future operations.

In the last 16 months, the 1st TSC and its more than 20,000 Soldiers, civilians and contractors, in conjunction with its strategic partners, has reduced more than 20,000 U.S. military vehicles, 25,000 containers and 8,000 containers worth of equipment. Everything — from pens and paper to night vision goggles and Mine Resistant Ambush Protected vehicles — is being retrograded.

Safety is the crux of this operation, and for that reason, the 1st TSC has accomplished all of this with no loss of life or serious injury. This is quite the feat considering that the 1st TSC and its subordinate units have conducted thousands of convoys to move an incalculable number of vehicles, containers and equipment for thousands of miles; used forklifts and rough terrain container handlers to move, sift through and sort countless pieces of equipment; and demilitarized a myriad of HMMWVs, MRAPs and other military vehicles. Additionally, these operations were conducted in the extremes of both cold and heat, on treacherous road networks, in conditions of limited visibility and under the unceasing threat of enemy attacks.

Challenges of the 1st TSC

The 1st TSC faces three unique challenges that impact its safety program. First, the 1st TSC is not a battle space owner in Afghanistan; consequently, all accident investigations and reports for its subordinate units are the responsibility of the regional commanders. Second, all 1st TSC subordinate units in Afghanistan are either under the operational, tactical or administrative control of the 1st TSC and are not organic to the two-star headquarters. This introduces another challenge to the safety program, as units do not fall under the 1st TSC until they are in a deployed environment. Finally, force manning caps in Afghanistan have led to the 1st TSC safety team managing the program from its forward command post in Kuwait and the main command post at Fort Bragg, N.C.

Overcoming Challenges – Leadership, Training, Empowerment

Leader involvement, training and empowering subordinates are essential to the success of the 1st TSC safety program. Leaders at all levels must be engaged in order to make the mission successful. With the challenges of the 1st TSC, the emphasis has to start at the top with Maj. Gen. Kurt Stein, 1st TSC commanding general.

First, Stein ensures his commanders recognize it is their program. He wants them to understand that a well-managed safety program, with command emphasis and a fully integrated risk management process across the range of military operations, is truly a combat multiplier. For those times he is unable to be physically co-located with his commanders, video teleconferencing allows him to always be connected to the quarterly executive safety council meetings. Staying connected tells his subordinate commanders that no matter where he is in the world, the safety program is always a top priority for him. Additionally, it keeps the lines of communication open, which is absolutely essential to the 1st TSC's ability to overcome the challenges it faces.

While the 1st TSC subordinate units do not fall under the control of the 1st TSC until they have boots on the ground in the area of responsibility, they do go through a series of training events prior to deployment. The 1st TSC has a staff presence at all of these training events. Early engagement during pre-mobilization training is one of Stein's priorities for all staff sections. It is essential to mission success, as it is one of the first opportunities for the 1st TSC safety team to engage with the unit leadership and safety personnel. During these training events, the safety team is able to brief the command and staff on the CG's safety priorities, concerns, goals and objectives.

The safety team must be empowered to manage the safety program. Aside from the 1st TSC's "Strategic Safety Goals and

Objectives," the 1st TSC safety team conducts safety officer huddles through online forums. This allows subordinate units to discuss safety challenges and concerns within their respective unit, review trends and statistics, and share best business practices by each unit. These meetings enable the 1st TSC safety team to engage each unit, provide guidance to address their concerns, develop and distribute safety alerts and document best business practices to share across the command and with units that will eventually rotate into theater as a part of the 1st TSC.

1st TSC Commanding General's Top Five Safety Priorities

- Safety is a commander's program. Commanders must take ownership of and promote safety as a command priority; it is not a check-the-block program.

- Strategic safety planning must involve the entire staff. Priorities and goals must be set, routine azimuth checks need to be accomplished and evaluation of achievement toward goals must be discussed.

- Conduct quarterly safety meetings. Commanders must brief their program and share lessons learned. Councils must be an open discussion and forum for cultural safety change.

- Accident investigations must take priority over collateral investigations. An investigation must be conducted for every accident; reporting itself is not enough. Information gained from accident investigations must be shared throughout the command to prevent future accidents.

- Appoint and empower the right safety team. They must be educated in all aspects of safety and occupational health. They must be engaged, motivated, physically capable and medically qualified to deploy with the force to serve as the commander's eyes and ears in accident prevention efforts.

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BREEDING OVERCONFIDENCE

CHIEF WARRANT OFFICER 4 JONATHAN CASE

I was told by a sage instructor pilot early in my career to be careful when I go on an extended training cycle, operation or deployment. He told me it had been his experience that when pilots had a lot of meaningful repetition, they got really good. "Be careful, because you are going to get good," he said. "Being good is one thing, but you have to be careful because it can breed overconfidence and complacency."

I always worked arduously about making sure I — and when I became an IP, my guys — was not taking shortcuts. Something new to train or think about was what I tried to keep fresh in the troop. I never really gave much thought that overconfidence could be a bad thing. This aspect was pointed out in an after-action review one dark, rainy night in Mosul.

On a January night mission, two AH-64As were flying as a convoy escort from Kirkuk to Mosul. The weather had been overcast for about three days with an almost continuous light drizzle. We launched from Tikrit and refueled on arrival at Kirkuk. Our link up with the convoy was uneventful and, initially, relatively smooth. About midway to Mosul, the rain increased from a drizzle to heavy downpour. Visibility began to drop at a constant rate, but our focus was on completing the mission and getting back home. We had a couple of maintenance issues with both aircraft, and the troop needed ours back for follow-on missions the next day. We were confident we could get it all completed.

Despite our lead ship's best effort, and due to the deteriorating weather, the convoy's lead Stryker took a wrong turn on a road that ran parallel to the military supply route. This road became one lane onto a bridge that was under repair and did not reach across the river. This chain of events led to about an hour-and-a-half delay to get all the vehicles that went on the bridge turned around, back tracked to the MSR and on our way once they were back in chalk order.

About five kilometers from Mosul Airfield, a Stryker broke an axle. The ground commander determined the ground convoy would continue while two Strykers and the air team would stay on station until a wrecker could get back to the broken vehicle.

We were mission first, so we stayed on station and delayed our mission about another hour. By the time we escorted the remainder of the convoy to Mosul and refueled, we were pushing a three-hour delay from our original time table and the weather was deteriorating. We knew we could stay in the transient aircrew containerized housing units and talked about that option before moving to the forward arming and refueling point. We were confident we could get home because we were getting good at this, after all.

After refueling, the radio conversation was brief. If we were going to make it home, we'd have to go now. And with that, we pulled pitch.

Since the weather was getting so bad, we came up with an IFR (I fly roads) plan. We set out to follow the MSR from Mosul to Tikrit. Our initial 300-foot altitude turned into 200 feet and then below 100 feet. Both our pilot night vision system pictures were subpar to say the least. I instructed my co-pilot gunner to put on his goggles to see if it improved our situation.

It is a funny thing about the space/time continuum: the exact point that Chalk 2 went inadvertent IMC was exactly two seconds after Chalk 1 realized they were IIMC and announced, "We just punched in!" I was looking down and left toward the MSR when I heard the IIMC call and shifted my focus to see if I could locate the lead aircraft. Anything other than the green blob in my eye would have been nice. Just to be sure, I checked with my CPG, and by the time he goggled up, he was seeing the same as me. Our troop had a policy of keeping the road between us while traveling and whenever the tactical situation allowed. It always reduced the workload of deconflicting the aircraft. This night, that tactic worked out well for us. Lead turned left and started to climb, and I turned right.

I was out after about two minutes; lead was only in it a few minutes longer. Both aircrews came to their senses and we decided to head back to Mosul for the night. We also determined that trying an in-flight link up was a risk that was not worth taking. We split our altitudes by 1,000 feet and contacted Mosul approach. As we approached the airfield, we were able to pick up the ground lights and preceded VMC back to the airfield. During our AAR of the flight, we realized there was not any reason to press to get home other than it would have been an inconvenience to stay in the CHUs.

At the end of the day, we thought that getting the convoy escort in bad weather and all the setbacks completed was something to build on, but the overconfidence that led to the decision to launch for home was something we all took with us as something to watch out for in the future. We ended up sleeping in the same transient CHU we had hoped to avoid, and it only took two ships going IIMC — and our confidence in our skills — to get there.

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ACCIDENT BRIEFS

AVIATION

AH-64D

Class A

The aircraft crashed just after takeoff from the airfield and came to rest on its left side. One crewmember suffered abrasions in the impact.

During aircraft qualification training, the crew reported uncommanded cyclic input. The aircraft contacted the ground and was damaged.

AH-64E

Class A

The crew was participating in night operations when they detected a smoke odor in the cockpit. While conducting an emergency landing, the crew experienced an electric power outage in the cockpit and impacted the ground. The crew was able to egress.

MQ-5B

Class A

The system initiated an uncommanded descent and impacted the runway. The aircraft was deemed a total loss.

RQ-7B

Class A

The crew experienced RPM fluctuations while the system was in flight, followed by full engine failure at 300 feet AGL during TALS acquisition. The system landed with damage.

The crew experienced engine failure during flight and deployed the recovery chute. The system crashed on impact, sustaining significant damage.

GROUND

Army Motor Vehicle

Class A

Two Soldiers died when their M1165 IAP/armor-ready HMMWV took on water while fording a river during a live-fire reconnaissance mission.

DRIVING

PMV-4

Class A

A Soldier died after his vehicle struck a telephone pole and caught fire.

A Soldier was killed when his vehicle ran off the road and hit a tractor-trailer parked in the emergency lane. It is believed fatigue was a factor in the accident.

A Soldier was killed when his vehicle collided with another vehicle at an intersection.

PMV-2

Class A

A Soldier died after his motorcycle struck a deer. The Soldier was licensed and wearing full PPE at the time of the crash.

A Soldier was killed when a van crossed the center line and struck his motorcycle. The Soldier was licensed, properly trained and wearing full PPE.